



American State Papers: Public Lands and Claims

The *American State Papers* is a compilation of congressional documents covering the period 1789 to 1838. The destruction of the Capitol in 1814 by the British as well as the lack of adequate recordkeeping in the early years of the government heightened Congresses' interest in publishing the records of the Senate and House in an organized and accessible form. In an act of March 2, 1831, Congress made provision to publish executive and legislative writings from the first 13 Congresses. Between 1832 and 1861, Congress printed 38 volumes of documents organized into 10 series. Series VIII (*Public Lands*) and IX (*Claims*) can provide information such as ages of claimants, locations of claims, places of residence, as well as names of wives, children, and other relatives.

Public Lands

The *American State Papers* contains eight volumes in Series VIII relating to public lands. The public domain is land owned by the Federal Government that is subject to sale or transfer of ownership under laws passed by Congress and includes western lands that the original states ceded to the United States as well as acquisitions from foreign governments. States that the Federal Government formed from the public domain are called public land states. Land claims in the *American State Papers* relate to the public land states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The land grants and claims consist of military bounty lands, militia claims, pre-emption rights, homestead settlements, claims by refugees, agreements with Indian Nations, and the settlement of private land claims on public domain.

The original 13 states as well as Kentucky, Maine, Tennessee, and Vermont, have no public domain; however, several of these states ceded land to Congress for the benefit of the United States. That land then became part of the public domain. The *American State Papers* contains information on land claims dealing with the following states and their cessions to the United States: Georgia, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia.

Claims

Series IX of the *American State Papers* deals with claims presented to Congress that were not directly related to land claims. For most of the 19th century, Congress served in an appellate capacity on private claims against the United States. The documents in this series cover a wide array of claims brought before Congress from 1789 to 1823.

Index

The *American State Papers* are available online on the Library of Congress's American Memory website at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsp.html>. The National Archives, as well as other repositories and public or academic libraries, has a printed, comprehensive index to Series VIII (*Public Lands*) and Series IX (*Claims*). The index is organized alphabetically by last and first name as it RR #403

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appears in the *American State Papers*, followed by the volume number and page number separated by a colon. The volumes are numbered 1 through 9. Volumes 1 through 8 correspond to *Public Lands*, and volume 9 corresponds to *Claims*.

____ McMullin, Phillip W., ed. *Grassroots of America: A Computerized Index to the American State Papers: Land Grants and Claims, 1789–1837, with other Aids to Research* (Government Document Serial Set Numbers 28 through 36). Salt Lake City, UT: Gendex Corporation, 1972. (J33.M3)

For more information, see the following reference reports:

- *Records of the U.S. Congress Relating to Private Claims*
- *Early Congressional Private Claims in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–1817*
- *Early Congressional Private Claims in the U.S. Senate, 1797–1811*
- *The Accompanying Papers of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1865–1877*

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